2.2.8 VEGETATION

The planning area supports vegetation typical of the Great Basin. The extremes of climate, elevation, exposure, and soil type combine to produce a diverse growth environment for a wide variety of plant species. The primary plant communities in the planning area are desert sink scrub, saltbush scrub, sagebrush scrub, Utah juniper woodland, and subalpine woodland. Secondary plant communities include broadleaf riparian scrub, dune, and meadow.

Playas make up approximately 15% of the planning area, which are barren. Salt-tolerant shrubs such as greasewood grow in edge-area dunes, mounds, and sand sheets. The deep soils along lower slopes (3,800 to 4,200 feet) on the flats adjacent to the playas support sagebrush and black-greasewood. Shadscale, bud sagebrush, and Bailey greasewood dominate the alluvial fans at elevations of 4,200 to 5,000 feet. Big sagebrush types dominate mountain sites up to about 5,500 feet elevation. Mountain big sagebrush, low sagebrush, bitterbrush, mountain mahogany, Utah juniper, and aspen are found at elevations above 5,500 feet.

The vegetation communities along with the soils that support them form the base resources that support many other resources and uses including wildlife and fishery populations, livestock, wild horses and burros, and recreational uses.

Objectives

- To retain sagebrush communities on at least 75 percent of the potential sagebrush habitat in the planning area with sagebrush cover sufficient to support sagebrush-dependent wildlife species.
- To retain non-sagebrush-dominated shrubland and woodland communities (e.g., salt-desert shrub, mountain shrub and Utah juniper) over greater than 75 percent of potential sites within the planning area.
- To achieve native woody, forb, grass, and nonvascular vegetation composition, productivity and community structure within the planning area that is consistent with the indicators described in the Land Health Standards.
- To retain all existing aspen clones, to expand the area occupied by existing aspen stands where possible, and to achieve mixed age classes in stands over the life of the plan.
- To consider the maintenance and enhancement of natural ecological processes as the dominant factor in determining the composition and distribution of plant communities in the Wilderness Zone.
- To protect the natural condition and biodiversity of the planning area by preventing or limiting the spread of noxious weeds [as identified in the Nevada State Noxious Weed List (Nevada Revised Statute 555.0100)] that displace native vegetation; to use Integrated Weed Management principles to detect and eradicate all existing infestations; to eliminate new infestations before they begin to spread; and to prevent or limit the spread of established weeds into areas containing little or no infestation.
- To prevent the total acres dominated by invasive annual species (cheatgrass and other similar plants) within the planning area from increasing over the life of the plan.
- To maintain or achieve, within 15 years, Properly Functioning Condition status for 90 percent of wetland vegetation community sites within the planning area consistent with Land Health Standards.

Balsam root flowering in the High Rock area

Vegetation Management

VEG-1: Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be conducted in areas that have been burned by wildland fires or invaded by invasive species. Seed mixes will be used that have a high probability of successful establishment of species that provide for site stabilization and recovery. Native shrub and herbaceous species will be emphasized, but nonnative species may be used in restoration or rehabilitation where natives are not likely to be successful.

VEG-2: Rangeland vegetation communities at risk of stand conversion from native species to introduced annuals because of wildfire may be protected through the establishment of green stripping or other techniques using appropriate seed mixes and project layouts consistent with the objective of maintaining a natural landscape.

VEG-3: Seed collection will be allowed by permit within the planning area to support restoration of native plant communities.

VEG-4: Management will maintain or establish diversity mosaics and connectivity of upland communities at multiple scales across the landscape. Management will include a variety of methods to increase or decrease sagebrush over-stories to meet site-specific resource objectives.

VEG-5: Vegetation manipulation projects will be implemented primarily to move plant communities toward desired conditions, improve structural and species diversity, and protect soil and water resources.

VEG-6: The frequency, distribution and ecological function of stands of mountain shrubs will be restored to stable conditions, and then maintained consistent with site potential and other management objectives.

VEG-7: Site-specific prescriptions will be created for restoration and maintenance of individual aspen stands to achieve the objectives.

VEG-8: On portions of rangelands that are dominated by monoculture stands of annual grasses, where the likelihood of restoration is high, habitat complexity and structure will be restored through seeding.

VEG-9: Mature sagebrush cover will be retained on sage-grouse habitats unless an evaluation conducted as part of an adaptive management process shows that alteration of shrub cover will increase habitat values for sage-grouse and other sagebrush-dependent wildlife species.

VEG-10: Vegetation treatments, including prescribed fire, will be allowed in all Wilderness Areas, consistent with a site-specific minimum required/ tool analysis, to restore the naturalness of areas that have been impacted by human activities.

Noxious Weeds

VEG-11: Control of noxious weeds will be conducted using the best combination of treatment practices developed specifically for the target species and infested site, consistent with Nevada Revised Statute 555.010. Such treatments will include Best Management Practices consistent with Integrated Weed Management principles.

Note: Practices will include prevention of disturbing activities to maintain competitive vegetation cover and reduce the distribution and introduction of noxious weed seed; use of mechanical methods to physically remove noxious weeds; performance of management actions that limit the spread of noxious weeds by natural means; and application of herbicides and biological controls.

VEG-12: Weed infestations in the Wilderness Zone will be controlled by methods consistent with a minimum required/tool analysis and Integrated Weed Management principles. Noxious weeds in the Wilderness Zone will be controlled using hand tools and, where manual treatments alone will not eradicate weed populations, with chemical and biological methods.

Springtime in the Calico Mountain Wilderness looking out on the west arm of the playa

Notes: The Livestock Grazing, Wild Horse and Burro, Wildlife, and Wilderness sections of the RMP contain additional decisions that affect the management of vegetation resources.

There are no specific soils objectives or decisions in the RMP. The soils requirements for Land Health Standards and the objectives and decisions related to vegetation provide adequate guidance for the management of soil related resources.